
LOCATION	Beirut, Lebanon - Online
DATE	10 September 2020
CHAIR	Logistics Sector
PARTICIPANTS	Action Against Hunger (ACH), Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), CARE International, Danish refugee Council (DRC), INSEAD, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Medical Corps (IMC), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Oxfam, Polish Center for International Aid (PCPM), Première Urgence Internationale (PUI), Relief International, Save the Children, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Welthungerhilfe, World Health Organization (WHO), World Vision.
ACTION POINTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Logistics Sector to share the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for custom procedures by next week.• The Sector Coordinator to put partners in touch with the focal point from WHO for the COVID-19 Joint Working Group• Map of warehouses will be available on the Logistics Cluster webpage for Lebanon next week.
AGENDA	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Update on Custom Procedures2. COVID-19 Joint Working Group3. AOB/Questions

1. Update on Custom Procedures

- Recap from previous meeting: in response to the letter addressed to the Higher Council of Lebanese Customs last week, requesting the nomination of a focal point within the administration, Mr. Samer Dia, Head of Airport Customs, has been appointed as a focal point to facilitate the process of importing required relief goods for eligible humanitarian actors.
- Mr. Dia, the customs focal point for humanitarian actors, clarified the process for requesting customs clearance and tax exemptions:
 - Any organization aiming to import goods will have to first submit a letter to the High Relief Commission (HRC), chaired by Major General Mohamed Khair. They will request to the HRC to be tax exempted, according to Decree 6850, promulgated on 14 August by the Lebanese government. Only registered organisations are eligible for this procedure, they will have to include their Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) in the letter.
 - The HRC will then provide a letter of approval to the organisation.

- Organisations will then present this letter of approval, along with the usual importation documents (invoice, bill of lading or airway bill, packing list, donation certificate) directly to customs.
- This procedure does not exempt organisations importing medical cargo from undergoing the extensive approval process at ministry level.
- The current procedure to import medical cargo is as follows:
 - Organisations must submit all their documents to the Ministry of Public Health for approval.
 - Then, organisations must obtain approval from relevant syndicates (for example, Syndicate of Pharmacy, etc).
 - Then, organisations must go through custom procedures.
 - Once the cargo shipment arrives in Lebanon, it must be inspected from every relevant entity, and then validated once again by the Ministry of Public Health.
- The Sector Coordinator is working with OCHA and WHO to establish a faster and more facilitated clearance process with the Ministry of Public Health.
- The Sector Coordinator will present a simplified procedure process for medical cargo to present to the Ministry of Public Health, and a simplified procedure process for food imports to be presented to the Ministry of Agriculture.
- One partner inquired about a special permit issued for imports through the Ministry of International Affairs. The Sector Coordinator will reach out to have a bilateral conversation regarding this.
- One partner asked if military planes can be used to import medical cargo that will be exempt from custom and tax procedures. The Sector Coordinator urged partners to follow the advised procedure for imports. The Sector Coordinator is working with the HRC and OCHA to authorize exemptions for a list of all the partners involved in the Beirut blast response.
- One partner shared their experience clearing vehicles that were part of the COVID-19 response. They were told that only relief items are given the tax exemption, however vehicles are considered operational and hence, were not granted exemption. Also, exemptions are only for donations related to the Beirut blast response. Partners wanting to clear COVID-19 related items will be asked to prove that they are intended for people affected by the Beirut blast and not for isolation centres.
- The Sector Coordinator clarified that, together with OCHA, the Logistics Sector has been advocating to get custom exemptions on COVID-19 related items since June. The plan is to shift the focus to COVID-19 related response items once there is clarity on the custom procedures and exemptions for relief items related to the Beirut blast.
- Partner raised the issue that purchased items are not granted exemption, only donated items are. However, a parent organisation cannot be considered a donor to the in-country organisation. This has caused issues because it prevents organisations from getting exempted on imports that they have purchased. The Sector Coordinator will discuss this issue with OCHA colleagues and the Humanitarian Coordinator.
- The Logistics Sector will provide an SOP on custom procedures early next week.

2. COVID-19 Joint Working Group

- The COVID-19 Joint Working Group, co-chaired by WHO and UNICEF, is for any organisation bringing in goods to Lebanon in response to the COVID-19 crisis.
- The Sector Coordinator invited Samar Hammoud, from WHO, to elaborate on the role of the Working Group.
- The Working Group is built on the eighth pillar of the COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan. It addresses all the operations and logistics support to the supply and delivery of COVID-19 interventions. One of the main actions of the group is related to custom clearance procedures of COVID-19 related shipments for members from UN agencies, International NGOs, and other partners. This is a potential collaboration point between the working group and the Logistics Sector.
- The Working Group has consolidated a platform to map and strategize procurement. A sub-group has been established to develop a unified procurement system that will increase cost efficiency for partners.
- Partners who would like to join the working group are asked to indicate their interest and the Sector Coordinator will put them in touch with Samar, the WHO focal point. Moving forward, the Sector Coordinator suggested having the Logistics Sector and Joint Working Group meetings back to back, for partners interested to hear about medical cargo specifically.

3. AOB/ Questions

- The Shelter Sector in Beirut is conducting a market survey to assess suppliers' capacity to cover the needs of organisations and private sector in the upcoming months. The Sector Coordinator encourages partners to launch similar market assessments, especially regarding health, food, and shelter, in order to anticipate any potential shortages and needs.
- A map for available warehouse services will be published on the Lebanon page by next week.
- This is the last meeting for the Sector Coordinator, Cyril Martin, in Beirut. He will be leaving on Saturday but will continue to chair the coordination meetings remotely. He will also continue to follow up and liaise with colleagues in-country. The OCHA office and WFP Logistics team will be taking over after the end of his assignment. He urged partners to contact him by WhatsApp or email (Cyril.martin@wfp.org) if they have any questions or requests.

The next Logistics Sector coordination meeting will take place online on Thursday 17 September at 16:00 Beirut time.

Meeting Minutes, 10 September 2020

Beirut, Lebanon



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